



Compliments of the Institute of Jewish Studies (founded by [Yankel Rosenbaum](#) HY"D) First Published Adar 5761 Vol 23.20
 Printing in part sponsored by **NLZ Imports, D&A Werdiger, Weis Printing** – email: zichron-yaakov@hotmail.com
 (In memory of Moshe Yehuda ben Avrohom Yaakov, Mala Mindel bas Meir, Moshe Tzvi ben Yitzchok Aharon, Gittel bas Sinai,
 Nechemia ben Menachem Mendel, Yaakov ben Menachem Mendel)

Beshalach 5784

THE OBJECTIVE IS WAR

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

When Pharaoh let the people go, G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for it was near, [and] G-d said, 'Lest the people reconsider when they see war, and return to Egypt'" (13:17)

Going from Egypt, the quickest route to Canaan runs through Philistine territory. But at all costs, G-d did not want the Jews to face the prospect of war with this potential enemy. G-d therefore directed the Jews to travel a roundabout longer route to their desired destination. This pattern of sparing the Jews the rigors of natural battle continued for some time. When the Egyptians pursued them through the desert, Moshe instructed them not to fear: "G-d will battle for you, and you shall remain silent." Shortly thereafter, when the Amalekites attacked the Jews, a contingent of Jews was dispatched to defend the nation, but their victory was entirely supernatural: "When Moshe would raise his hand, Israel would prevail" (Shmot 17:11). Despite the difficulty of slavery, the Jews in Egypt had developed a certain comfort zone—the prototypical battered person syndrome—and any battle could have potentially triggered a mass return to their point of origin.

The Jews had forty years to prepare themselves for the great war which they would inevitably need to fight once they entered the land of Canaan. This war would be a completely natural military conquest (with the exception of the fall of Jericho), which would require gumption and military acumen. Only then would the Jews truly prove their courage and resolve.

All the above is true in a spiritual sense, too. The fledgling nation which left Egypt was in its spiritual infancy, and a return to the bankrupt values of the depraved Egyptian lifestyle was a real risk. However, leading a spiritual life while surrounded by a world which revolves around the pursuit of money and materialism is a real challenge. The Zohar says, "Bread by the tip of the sword is consumed." Maintaining spiritual integrity and purity in a society with antithetical values is indeed a battle.

At least until they had developed strength, proper ammunition and spiritual defenses, G-d saw the need to spare the Jews the vicissitudes of spiritual war—a war which could have prompted them to return to their old habits and lifestyle.

To this end He surrounded the Jews with clouds of glory, and fed them manna, quail, and water from the Well of Miriam. No careers and no worries. With miracles abounding and all their needs met, they were in effect training themselves for the spiritual mother of all battles which awaited them in Canaan, pitting a nation's spiritual resolve against the real world's tendency to consume those who enter her domain.

Desert life was nice, but until they battled the elements in Canaan, the Jews had proved nothing.

Something to think about next time you feel the struggles of life starting to get you down . . .

INCIDENTALLY, THE FIRST PURELY natural war which the Jews fought was against the nation of Midian. The word Midian shares the same root as the Hebrew word madon, which means "quarrels." This name is very apropos for a nation which picked a fight with the Jews who had absolutely no designs of ever harming them or conquering their land.

There are many battles we are meant to wage, but the very first one we must fight is baseless hatred and mindless bickering. Only after this battle has been successfully concluded, and we constitute a united front, can we focus our energies on doing battle with all the other insidious forces, and hope to enter the Promised Land.

BELIEF IN BELIEF

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"They said to Moshe, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us out to die in the Wilderness?'" (14:11)

Until recently, psychology proposed that willpower was like a battery. You start the day with a full charge, but each time you have to control your thoughts, your feelings or your behavior, you zap the battery's energy. Then, without the chance to rest and recharge your resources, they run dangerously low, which makes it far harder to maintain your patience and concentration, and to resist temptation.

Laboratory tests appeared to provide evidence for this process. If participants were asked to resist eating cookies left temptingly on a table, they subsequently showed less persistence when solving a mathematical problem, because their reserves of willpower had been exhausted. Drawing on the Freudian term for the part of the mind that is responsible for reining in our impulses, this process was known as "ego depletion." People who had high self-control might have bigger reserves of willpower initially, but even they would be worn down when placed under pressure.

In 2010, however, the psychologist Veronika Job published a study that questioned the foundations of this theory, with some intriguing evidence that ego depletion depended on people's underlying beliefs. Job, who is a professor of motivation psychology at the University of Vienna, first designed a questionnaire, which asked participants to rate a series of statements on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree).

They included the following:

- 1) When situations accumulate that challenge you with temptations, it gets more and more difficult to resist temptations.
- 2) Strenuous mental activity exhausts your resources, which you need to refuel afterwards.
- 3) If you have just resisted a strong temptation, you feel strengthened and you can withstand new temptations.
- 4) Your mental stamina fuels itself. Even after strenuous mental exertion, you can continue doing more of it.

If you agree more with statements one and two, you are considered to have a "limited" view of willpower, and if you agree more with three and four, you are considered to have a "non-limited" view of willpower.

Job next gave the participants some standard laboratory tests examining mental focus, which is considered to depend on our reserves of willpower. She found that people with the limited mindset tended to perform exactly as ego depletion theory would predict. After performing one task that required intense concentration — such as applying fiddly corrections to a boring text — they found it much harder to pay attention to a subsequent activity than if they had been resting beforehand. The people with the non-limited view, however, did not show any signs of ego depletion. They showed no decline in their mental focus after performing a mentally taxing activity.

The participants' mindsets about willpower, it seemed, were self-fulfilling

prophecies. If they believed that their willpower was easily depleted, then their ability to resist temptation and distraction quickly dissolved. But if they believed that “mental stamina fuels itself,” then that is what occurred.

Judaism is the ultimate exercise of deferred gratification. We are asked to reject much of the immediate gratification of this world for the permanent gratification of the World to Come. Your ability to defer that gratification depends on how much you believe that deferred gratification exists.

People tend to think that belief in Hashem is like an on/off switch. You either believe or you don't believe. In truth, each one of us is on an infinite and constantly sliding scale, whose extremities are total faith at one end and total atheism at the other. “There are no atheists in a fox hole” runs the well-known aphorism, and on the other hand, as Rabbi Elazar says in Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, “Know what to answer an atheist.” And this should also include the “atheist” that may lurk in any of us.

Truth be told, belief is a middah — a character trait — and it can either be strengthened or weakened.

But the key to belief in Hashem is the faith that I can strengthen my belief without limit.

JUMP INTO THE SEA

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

Moshe orchestrates a full year of plagues which completely debilitates Egyptian society. After the climactic 10th and final plague, the slaying of the First Born, Pharaoh finally agrees to let the Jews leave Egypt.

But, like any good megalomaniac, Pharaoh changes his mind and chases after them. When the Jews look in their rear-view mirrors and see the thundering Egyptian chariots fast approaching, panic spreads. The Jews feel trapped. There is no other outlet but the sea — the Red Sea.

The Jews begin to berate Moshe: "Why did you have to bring us out here to die in the desert? You should have just left us alone to work for the Egyptians!" (14:11-12)

Ludicrous! How could the Jews, after 210 years of intolerable suffering in Egypt, complain to Moshe for liberating them?!

About 20 years ago, an incident occurred in Stockholm where terrorists captured and held hostages. The hostages were abused both physically and emotionally. At the news conference following their release, the hostages all spoke in complimentary, glowing terms about their captors! Psychologists have since identified the "Stockholm Syndrome," whereby prisoners develop comfort and satisfaction in captivity.

For the Jews in Egypt, life was comfortable. In slavery, the rations may be meager and the bed made of straw, but there's an up-side as well: all one's needs are provided, and there are no challenging decisions to be made. No laundry, no shopping, no deals, no deadlines. The Hebrew word for Egypt, "Mitzrayim," means a "place of confinement." Sometimes it's the smallest box which makes us feel the most secure.

ONE GIANT LEAP

Three million Jews are standing at the shores of the Red Sea. Their options are either to go forward into the un-split sea, or back to Egypt. The sea is cold, strange and foreboding. Egypt is warm, familiar and comfortable.

The Egyptians are thundering closer. The Jews are panicked. And then Nachshon, from the tribe of Yehuda, steps foot into the sea. (The original "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.") But the sea still does not split. Nachshon continues as the water reaches his ankles, then up to his knees. Still no split. Nachshon forges deeper: Up to his waist, his chest. Still no split.

Nachshon's mind races: Maybe we should return to Egypt. Then he reminds himself: Life is about growing ... leaving the place of confinement behind... moving forward into the unknown ... But the alternative — to stay in our small space of warmth and comfort, is to choose stagnation and, ultimately, death. Egypt, Nachshon knew, was no option at all.

By now the water has reached his neck. Nachshon is being challenged to his limit. Yet he continues into the sea. As the water reaches his nostrils, at this last possible moment... the Red Sea splits. The Jewish People all rush in after him. Finally, freedom.

SELF ESTEEM

Although every Jew passed through on dry land, the experience of Nachshon was qualitatively different. When Nachshon walked through the sea, he was alive and invigorated. The future had issued its challenge, and Nachshon confronted it head-on. Slavery was baggage he'd left behind. He was liberated, both body and soul.

Contrast this to the experience of the rest of the Jewish People. The others, having entered only after the sea split, were in one sense disappointed in

themselves for not having the bravery of Nachshon. Nachshon "entered the water first" (Shmot 14:22); the others "entered first on dry land" (14:29).

The Gaon of Vilna (18th century Europe) offers a beautiful insight: In describing the experience of Nachshon, the Torah says "and the water formed a wall" (Shmot 14:22). But for the rest of the people, the Hebrew word for wall, "choma," is spelled peculiarly — without a Vav. This can be read "Chaima," meaning anger. The Torah is reflecting each Jew's disappointment (and G-d's "anger") for not having had the courage to fulfill their own potential. The growth opportunity had been lost forever.

BREAKING OUT

The Red Sea appears in our own lives as well. Ultimately, the story of our lives comes down to a few key moments of decision. These spell the difference between a life of achievement versus one of regret. Often we procrastinate until the best option no longer remains. The door is closed and we comfort ourselves by saying, "Oh well, what could I do, things just didn't work out."

This Shabbos, as we read the portion of Beshalach, take a few minutes and ask yourself:

- What negative situation am I perpetuating simply because I am not willing to make the effort to change?
- Why am I afraid to change?
- What is the worst thing that can possibly happen?
- What is holding me back from achieving my full potential?
- In 10 years from now, what decision will I regret not having made?
- Sometimes the answer is just "do it." To jump into the sea.

The question was once asked of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, the great 18th century Chassidic leader: "What if someone feels distant from G-d and Torah? How can he enter the 'loop' of spirituality which on one hand is so appealing, yet on the other hand is intimidating?" Rebbe Nachman answered: "Go to a Shabbos table and sing a niggun (melody). Sing it with zest and verve, with feeling from deep in your soul. That's the way to jump in."

LIFE'S CRESCENDO

Unfortunately, our lives are not equipped with background music reaching its crescendo, to alert us that the "big moment" has arrived. Our only hope of escaping the confines of Egypt is to honestly confront our fears and embrace the opportunities that G-d gives us to grow.

Of course, we cannot always know what's waiting on the other side of the sea. But that's part of the beauty. It's our chance to become invigorated with the fullness of life.

The Torah tells us: Nachshon chose life. We must do the same. The feeling is liberating. Our self-esteem depends on it. And it is our only true option.

FROM FADING TO FOREVER

RABBI BEREL WEIN (Torah.org)

There is a great difference in the perception of a momentous historic event, between the generation that actually experienced it, was witness to and perhaps even participated in it, and later generations who know of the event through tradition and history. The facts regarding events can be transmitted from one generation to the next, even for thousands of years, but the emotional quality, the pervading actual mood and atmosphere present at the time never survives the passage of time and distance from the event itself.

Perhaps nowhere is this truism more strikingly evident than in the drama of the salvation of the Jewish people at the shores of Yam Suf. At the moment of Divine deliverance, Moshe and Miriam and the people of Israel burst into exalted song, registering their relief and triumph over the destruction of their hated oppressors.

This song of triumph is so powerful that it forms part of the daily prayer service of Israel for millennia. But, though the words have survived and been sanctified by all generations of Jews from Moshe till the present, the original fervor, intensity and aura of that moment is no longer present with us.

The Pesach Hagadah bids us to relive the Exodus from Egypt as though we

actually were present then and experienced it. But it is beyond the ability of later generations do so fully and completely. We can recall and relive the event intellectually and positively in an historic vein but the emotional grandeur of the moment has evaporated over time.

We are witness as to how the events of only a century ago – the two great World Wars, the Holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel, etc. – have begun to fade away from the knowledge, memory and recall of millions of Jews today, a scant few generations after these cataclysmic events took place. In this case, it is not only the emotion that has been lost but even the actual facts and their significance – social, religious and national – are in danger of disappearing from the conscious thoughts and behavior of many Jews.

In light of this, it is truly phenomenal that the deliverance of Israel at Yam Suf is so distinctly marked and remembered, treasured and revered in the Jewish memory bank. The reason for this exceptional survival of historic memory is that it was made part of Jewish religious ritual, incorporated in the Torah itself, and commemorated on a special Shabbat named for the event. It thus did not have to rely on historic truth and memory alone to preserve it for posterity.

Religious ritual remains the surest way of preserving historical memory, far stronger than May Day parades and twenty-one gun salutes and salvos. Ritual alone may be unable to capture the emotion and atmosphere of the actual event but it is able to communicate the essential facts and import of the event to those who never witnessed or experienced it. The song of Moshe, Miriam and Israel still reverberates in the synagogues of the Jewish people and more importantly in their minds and hearts as well.

AN ELOQUENT SILENCE

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

If ever there was anyone caught between a rock and a hard place it was the Jewish people on the shores of the Sea of Reeds. With their backs to the churning waters, they watched in wide-eyed horror as thousands of Egyptian chariots thundered towards them, murderous steel blades flashing in the sun. Desperately, the people plunged into the depths of the sea, and wonder of wonders, Hashem parted the waters and led them through to safety.

At this transcendent moment, their hearts filled with joy and gratitude, they burst into a thrilling song of praise which the Torah records verbatim. In one of the most passionate lines, they cry out, “Who is like You among the lords, O Hashem?” The Sages perceive a deeper dimension in this declaration. The Torah uses the Hebrew word *eilim* for lords, and the Sages detect in this an allusion to the Hebrew word *ilmim*, silent ones. Accordingly, the Jewish people were also saying, “Who is like You among the silent ones, O Hashem?” This, the Sages explain, was a prophetic reference to the destruction of the Second Temple and the devastation of Jerusalem by the evil Roman general Titus, who desecrated the sanctuary and spilled rivers of innocent Jewish blood while Hashem remained silent.

The question immediately arises: Why choose the occasion of the splitting of the sea to mention Hashem’s silence during the holocaust that destroyed Jerusalem?

We all know that when we go through periods of anguish we are inclined to feel alienation and anger towards Hashem – even if we ordinarily strive for high levels of faith and observance. Enough is enough, we scream silently. How can You let us suffer so much pain? And this feeling of abandonment, irrational as it is, just makes the suffering that much worse. Wouldn’t our suffering be more bearable if we could see Hashem watching over us throughout our ordeal, if we realized that, even in His silence, Hashem does not abandon a single person to random fate.

At the Sea of Reeds, this realization struck the Jewish people with great clarity. For so many years they had suffered the cruel agony of Egyptian shackles, their backs bent in backbreaking labor, their hearts and spirits shriveled inside their tortured bodies. It seemed as if the Creator had forgotten them. But now, in the most stunning miraculous display, He had split the sea to lead them to safety. Suddenly, they realized He had been watching over them all along, that His love for them stretched back hundreds of years to the Patriarchs. The pain and suffering had been an indispensable feature of the “iron crucible” of Egypt in which the Jewish people were molded and formed. From the perspective of hindsight, their suffering was not random, and the silence was very eloquent indeed.

As this important revelation sunk into the Jewish consciousness beside the sea, they realized how important it was to remember it for all future trials and travails. There would undoubtedly be other times of divine silence in

the face of Jewish suffering and misfortune. But if the Jewish people would have the wisdom to perceive the benevolent presence of the silent Creator they would be able to accept their lot with courage and hope, and their suffering would be mitigated. Even during times of such profound darkness as the destruction of Jerusalem by the evil Titus, they would not fall victim to despair.

A young boy was wheeled into the operating room for a serious procedure. He was frightened but all alone. He yearned for the comforting hand of his father, but his father had been barred from the sterile operating room.

I want my father, the boy thought desperately. I want him here. But his father did not come, and the boy was terribly upset and resentful. How could his father abandon him at this time, the most trying of his entire life?

The operation was successful, and the boy was returned to his room. There stood his father, tears streaming down his face. He hugged and kissed his son with a greater outpouring of love than ever before. “My son, my precious son,” he said. “How sad that you had to be in that operating room all by yourself, but I was in constant touch with the doctors. You did not leave my thoughts, not even for a moment.”

In our own lives, all of us go through difficult periods at one time or another. Grief and suffering are part of the very fabric of life. But the way we deal with them is up to us. If we recognize that our warm and loving Father in Heaven pays meticulous attention to every minute detail of our lives, that He is with us constantly even in our darkest moments, we can find peace and serenity that are not vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life.

THE SECRET OF GETTING FREE

SHIFRA HENDRIE (Chabad.org)

“The hurrieder I go, the behinder I get.” —Anonymous

Cell phones. E-mail. Video conferencing. The World Wide Web. A couple of decades ago, who could have imagined the world we take for granted today?

With such instantaneous access to information and communication, we can do lots of things at once. Obviously, this means we can accomplish much more in less time. And this, in turn, leaves us with much more satisfaction and fulfillment, as well as more time to enjoy it.

Right?

TECHNOLOGICAL MIRACLES: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

These technological miracles have made possible what was never even imaginable before. But, at the same time, they have created an intense pressure to have more, do more and be more.

It used to be that we would compare ourselves to the Joneses who lived down the block. The pressure of keeping up with the Joneses was stressful enough. Now we probably don’t even have the time to get to know our neighbors the Joneses, but we are aware of the Smiths, who built that big, beautiful house a few blocks away. And we notice the expensive cars and flashy careers, and all the other stuff we associate with “the good life.”

THE SLAVERY OF HAVING IT ALL

“You can have it all!” they scream out at you, “and if you don’t, there’s something wrong with your life. Just buy this _____ [gadget, car, self-help book, etc.] and you’ll feel the way you long to feel!” “Just start this _____ [business, diet, workout regimen], and your life will start being what it should be!”

Bombarded from every direction, we can hardly help but respond. We try harder, run faster and work longer, racing at breakneck speed like mad hamsters on a wheel.

No one expects to keep running forever. We all intend to stop—just as soon as we get where we’re going. When we’re satisfied with where we are.

The unfortunate paradox is: the faster you run and the more you do, the less satisfied you will probably be.

Here’s the secret: There’s nowhere to get. It doesn’t work that way. Life doesn’t stand still and let us take shots at it until we hit the bull’s-eye and win the prize. Life is a moving target.

WE LIVE IN UNIQUE TIMES

We live in unique times—times when we actually can accomplish far more, in quantity and quality, than ever before. This is a wonderful thing.

So where are we going wrong?

We have begun to believe that because we can accomplish, we must. That if something desirable exists, and we don’t have it, we aren’t fulfilled. That if there’s some standard out there, and we don’t meet it, we’ve failed. So, first we have to accomplish it all, have it all, “make it,” and then we can relax, kick back, and start to be ourselves.

Within this paradigm, instead of providing us with freedom, our increased

opportunities are turning us into slaves.

“HAVING IT ALL” IS NOT THE POINT

You can work on having the right body, but even if you do manage to succeed in dieting and exercising yourself to perfection—an unlikely prospect for most of us—you will inevitably age and lose the perfection you tried so hard to create.

You can work on making the right amount of money, and you may or may not succeed. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with money, in and of itself, if used in the right ways. But interestingly, some of the people who enjoy the most money and “success”—celebrities—often have the least enduring satisfaction in life, as evidenced by their heavy drug use and high divorce rates.

Or, you can work on finding the perfect love—the kind you read about in novels and see on film. The problem is that in real life, people aren’t always slick, polished, adoring, witty and immortal. They get angry, complain, bore us, and get disillusioned with us, too.

THE SECRET OF FREEDOM: MANNA FROM HEAVEN

Between their liberation from slavery in Egypt and their entrance into the Promised Land, there was a forty-year period where the Jewish people wandered through the desert. Those forty years provided a necessary transition between slavery and freedom, between exile and redemption.

In the desert, there was nothing to eat. So, G-d provided a special food, manna, that fell from Heaven each day. The people in the desert didn’t have to do anything to make the manna appear. All they had to do was go out to collect it.

And no matter how much or how little a person picked up, when he got home, he always had exactly the right amount of manna to satisfy him for that day. No more and no less.

The manna was miraculous. And, unlike many miracles, its miraculous nature was too obvious to mistake. Because it was impossible to collect too much or too little, it was glaringly obvious to everyone that their survival was directly in the hands of heaven.

True, each person had to do his part—to go out and collect his manna for the day—but that was it.

FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM

We all want to be free. Free from debt. Free from worry. Free from fat. Free from stress. But true freedom doesn’t come from outside yourself. If you are depending on that something to make you free, you’re already a slave.

True freedom comes from the inside, from a deep and powerful connection to who you truly are and why you’re here. From that place, connected to the source, you can create things you never thought possible. You can generate miracles in your own life and in the lives of others.

When you’re a slave, you are dependent on other people and outside circumstances for your wellbeing, for your very survival. You’re full of needs. Without having those needs met, you simply can’t be who you truly are. And since it’s impossible to “have it all,” you remain a slave.

When you’re free, you may still want things. And you can certainly strive to make things happen, but as an expression of who you authentically are.

Like the Jews in the desert, you will still have to go out to the field each day to collect your portion of manna. But you can do it peacefully, happily, confidently, trustingly. Not like a slave, but as someone who’s free.

THE KEY TO FREEDOM

The key to freedom is to know that you are here on earth as a soul in a body. To know that you are here for a reason, with a mission, one that can be carried out by you alone. And last, but certainly not least, to know that G-d is lovingly supervising every moment of your life, providing you with the precise circumstances—both gifts and challenges—that will help you fulfill that mission.

G-d is lovingly supervising every moment of your life if you start from this premise, then nothing can ever be wrong. Regardless of what your life looks like today, it’s simply the perfect starting point for your soul’s self-expression. It’s an opportunity to create joy, power, love, connection, peace, trust, intimacy, generosity, or whatever it is that you crave when you’re authentically you.

And when you live life from that place of freedom, miracles inevitably happen.

INPUT... OUTPUT

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

The sea had split. The enemy was drowned. And now the problems began. The newly liberated nation was stranded in a scorching desert facing an unending landscape of uncertainties. Taskmasters no longer responded to

their cries — Hashem did. He responded with protection and shelter on every level. But the Jews were still not satisfied. They were hungry. “If only we had died.. in the land of Egypt. Why did you liberate us to die in the desert?” they cried to Moshe. (16:3)

Hashem responds with a most miraculous and equally mysterious celestial gift. Food fell from the heavens, but the people accepted it with piqued curiosity. Indeed, the dew-covered matter satiated their hunger, but they were not sure what exactly it was. “Each man said to his friend, manna ! For they did not know what it was.” (16:14) The commentaries explain that the word manna is a Hebrew-Egyptian form of the word “what.”

At first, the Torah only discusses the physical attributes of the manna : “it was like a thin frost on the earth.” The Torah continues to tell us that on Shabbos the manna did not fall. A double portion fell on Friday — the extra portion was allotted for Shabbos. In referring to the manna of Shabbos the Torah tells us, “the children of Israel named it manna , and it tasted like a cake fried in honey.” Later, however, the Torah describes the manna ‘s taste differently: “it tasted like dough kneaded with oil.” (Bamidbar 11:8) Why does the Torah wait to describe the manna ‘s taste until Shabbos? Also, when did it taste sweet and when did it only taste like oily dough?

Another question is before Shabbos people asked, “what is it?” On Shabbos they named the miraculous food — “It is ‘what’” (manna). Why did the Jews wait until Shabbos to describe concretely the miraculous edible with an official title manna — the ‘what’ food?

IN THE TOWN OF LOMZA there was a group of woodcutters hired by the townsfolk to cut down trees for firewood. The strong laborers swung their axes and hit the trees all while shouting a great cry HAH with each blow. The timing had to be flawless. If the cry HAH came a split second early or, a second after the blade hit the tree, it would be a worthless shout that would not aid the lumberjacks at all.

Each year, Zelig the meshugener (crazy), a once-successful businessman who had lost his mind together with the loss of a young daughter, accompanied the woodcutters on their quest. He stood in the background and precisely as the ax hit the tree he, too, shouted on the top of his lungs HAH!

When it was time to get paid, the deranged Zelig also stood in line. “I deserve some silver coins!” he exclaimed. “After all without the chopping would not be as effective!”

The case was brought before the Chief Rabbi of Lomza who looked at the five lumberjacks and then at the meshugener. “Listen carefully, Zelig,” said the Rabbi. He then took 10 silver pieces in his hand and jingled them loudly. They made a loud clanging noise. Then he gave each woodsman two silver pieces. He turned to Zelig and smiled. “The men who gave the labor get the coins, and, Zelig, you who gave the sound, get the sound of the coins!”

HASHEM IN HIS INFINITE wisdom began our lessons in living through our daily fare. The Talmud states that the taste of the manna was integrally linked with the taster’s thoughts. If one thought of steak the manna tasted like steak: if one thought of borscht, the manna tasted like borscht. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim was once asked, “what happens if you think nothing?” He answered very profoundly: “If one thinks of nothing, then one tastes nothing!”

During the week the Jews had the manna but did not realize its great potential. The Malbim explains that is why it only tasted like oily dough. But on Shabbos, a day filled with sweet relaxation, heavenly thoughts filled the minds of the nation. And those sweet thoughts produced sweet tastes!

The Talmud also says that to small children the manna tasted like dough, but to scholars it tasted like honey. For if one thinks of honey, he tastes honey. When one thinks blandly, he has bland taste.

Perhaps on Shabbos the Jewish People realized the important lesson of life. The questions we face should not be addressed as eternally mysterious. We can not face the unknown with the question, “what is it?” Rather, we can define our destiny and challenge our uncertainties. “It is what!” What you put into it is exactly what you take out! Life presents us many opportunities. We can approach those moments with lofty thoughts and see, smell, and taste its sweetness. Or we can see nothing and taste nothing. We can chop hard and reap the benefits, or we can kvetch and enjoy only the echoes of our emptiness.

TWO LOAVES OF MANNA

RABBI LAZER GURKOW (Chabad.org)

Every Shabbat table boasts a goblet of wine and two loaves of bread — challah. Why do we have two loaves? Our Parshah teaches that, in the desert, G-d gave our ancestors a daily portion of manna. On Friday He gave

them two portions, one for Friday and the other for Shabbat. We mark this miracle by placing two loaves of bread on our Shabbat table.

THREE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF THE MANNA

1. Everyone came home with the standard measurement of Manna regardless of how much or little he gathered in the field.
2. All Manna that was left uneaten by sundown would spoil.
3. There was, however, one exception: the portion left over after sundown, on Friday. That remained fresh to be eaten on Shabbat.

THREE LESSONS

Everything in Torah carries a moral lesson that is eternal. Eternal lessons are as relevant today as they were on the day that they were written. What is the relevant moral lesson to be derived from the Manna's three qualities?

1. Our lot is determined in heaven, and we all receive our share. Working overtime will not increase our allotment, and working under-time will not decrease it either.
2. All money not utilized by the end of our lifetime — by "sundown" — will go to waste, because we cannot take it along.
3. There is, however, one exception: money that is saved for the Shabbat meal — i.e., used for the purpose of a Mitzvah. That money will never go to waste, and will earn its owner eternal reward in the World to Come.

AND THE WINNER IS ...

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Anyone familiar with the genealogy of the Jewish people would notice that the nation of Amalek is actually closely related to the Jewish people.

Esav, the twin brother of Yaakov had a son called Elifaz who had a child with a concubine named Timna who was Amalek. (Some say that Esav was the father and not Elifaz.)

Whichever way you look at it, Amalekites and Jews were cousins.

Despite this relationship, Amalek chose to keep a multi-generational hatred of the Jews going which has spanned millennia.

Why did G-d specifically create this eternal enmity?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 99b) provides the reason for this hatred.

Timna was actually a local princess who desperately wished to become part of the Jewish people.

"Timna sought to convert. She came before Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and they did not accept her. She went and became a concubine of Elifaz, son of Esav, and said, referring to herself: It is preferable that she will be a maidservant for this nation, and she will not be a noblewoman for another nation. Ultimately, Amalek, son of Elifaz, emerged from her, and that tribe afflicted the Jewish people. What is the reason that the Jewish people were punished by suffering at the hand of Amalek? It is due to the fact that they should not have rejected her when she sought to convert. However she was not accepted."

(Tosefos in Yevamos (109b) uses the case of Timna and its ramifications to conclude that if a person strongly wishes to convert, then they need to be accepted since the Jewish people were punished for not accepting Timna.) But why was she rejected?

R' Moshe Sternbuch suggests that they perceived some inherent fault with her and rejected her. Nevertheless, this was not the correct approach. They should have trusted that this was G-d's will.

We all try to 'pick winners' to make value decisions in life that will lead to success, health and happiness. But no-one can see the future. We need to trust that if Hashem places an opportunity in our way, there is a reason, even if we cannot see it.

News, Views & Opinion

UN: NO INDICATION HAMAS WAS BUILDING ELABORATE TUNNEL SYSTEM

MIKE WAGENHEIM (JNS.org 18-1-24)

Despite the presence of a Hamas terror tunnel system in the Gaza Strip now thought to be larger in scale than the London Underground, the United Nations insists it had no idea the tunnels were being built.

Asked on Wednesday whether, given the United Nations' sizable presence in Gaza via a variety of agencies, there had been any indication to the global body that tunnels were being constructed underground, a spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said, "No is clearly the answer for that."

Spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters that "it seems to me that all this infrastructure was built in a highly secretive way."

However, officials from the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) sounded the alarm on the presence of tunnels under U.N. facilities twice in 2017, and again in 2021 and 2022.

UNRWA alone has 13,000 employees in more than 300 facilities across Gaza. At least a dozen other U.N. agencies operate in Gaza. It has been well-documented that many U.N. employees in Gaza have professional and personal ties to Hamas.

Still, Dujarric insisted that the United Nations was unaware of the sophisticated labyrinth of tunnels being dug and fortified throughout Gaza.

"I mean, just to see it as an observer, to think that the U.N. had any understanding of what was ... any information about those operations, I think, is: No is clearly the answer for that," he said.

A senior official from the World Health Organization also insisted that none of its staffers saw any evidence of a Hamas presence at Gaza's Shifa Hospital, despite video footage showing terrorists whisking hostages into the facility on Oct. 7 with no pushback from hospital staff.

'A TERRORIST TRIED TO SELL MY SON'S HEAD IN GAZA'

VERED WEISS (WorldIsraelNews.com 17-1-24)

The father of fallen IDF soldier Adir Tahar who fought off terrorists in southern Israel kibbutzim on October 7th discussed with Channel 14 the ordeal the family endured to secure his son's entire remains from Gaza.

David, Adir's father, described how his son's body had been returned torn apart by explosives and abused by terrorists but without a head.

He said, "The terrorists abused the body, they beheaded it and took the head to Gaza."

David continued, "One of the terrorists tried to sell his head for \$10,000. It's just barbarism at insane levels. I received a headless corpse."

David added, "I insisted on seeing the body, and they tried to explain to me that I should not see it, but I am a father who must know everything about his children."

He described his horror, not only viewing the condition of the body, which had been damaged beyond recognition and mutilated by terrorists, but receiving his son's body without the head.

Adir's father described his desperate search for information in the ensuing weeks, desperate to recover Adir's head.

Finally, after interrogating a terrorist, Shin Bet informed David that they had located the head in Gaza.

The head was discovered inside the refrigerator of an ice cream shop in Gaza alongside tennis balls and documents.

Adir's head had been mutilated and a terrorist confessed that he attempted to sell it for \$10,000.

The head was brought back to Israel and was buried with the rest of Adir's remains in accordance with the rabbinate.

David also discussed his son's bravery and how he joined the 18 other soldiers in his unit on October 7th to battle the terrorists.

The Golani Brigade Sergeant and his unit fought with hundreds of terrorists, but ultimately, his body was blown to pieces by an anti-tank missile and grenades.

David said, "Adir was a fighter in the Golani, a smart, talented, and very humble boy."

He added, "He was loved by his friends and commanders."

'ISRAELIS REFUSED TO SEE THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PALESTINIANS'

RAN PUNI (IsraelHayom.com 19-1-24)

Tomer Tzaban fought terrorists in the IDF's Shimshon Unit, which focused on undercover operations in the Gaza Strip before it was disbanded in 1996 following the Oslo Accords. He is the author of the new book "In the Heart of Gaza" and the bestseller "Undercover in Gaza" (Kinneret Zmora-Bitan). Today, he is a diamantaire.

Q: Do you remember your last time in Gaza?

"When I left Gaza, only a few cells had weapons, very different from the situation today. Even if our cover was burned, we didn't find ourselves facing terrorists with assault rifles and RPGs from every corner. In most cases, it was fauda [Arabic for chaos, and a word Israeli undercover teams use when their mission has been compromised] with knives, sometimes handguns, and rifles.

"My last memory of Gaza is a thought: I'm leaving the place, and I really don't know what the future will bring to the place. I understand that this is a place we have no interest in controlling, and on the other hand, every area

we withdraw from will lead to a nest of terror. Gaza will not change. They don't want to build, develop, prosper. I find it hard to understand that mindset."

Q: From your fieldwork did you manage to understand how Gazans differ from us?

"Once, I witnessed terrorists interrogating a collaborator, and in the end stabbing and killing him. What changed my understanding of them was what happened next—they mutilated him and they cut off his legs, hands and genitals. They took a sadistic pleasure that I couldn't understand.

"This was the first time I realized that they were not like us in any way. I realized that we had failed to understand something very fundamental about them, so what we saw and heard on October 7, unfortunately, didn't surprise me."

Q: Things had been boiling under the surface for years, and on Oct. 7 we saw everything erupt.

"Israelis refused to see the truth. We had a mirror held up in front of us and we refused to look at it. Lately, the penny has dropped for me: People ask me: 'Is there no hope after all?' What we can see from this question is that many people are willing to ignore the truth; they fall for the illusion that there is a future for us with these people. We insist on finding something, which in my experience doesn't exist. ... There are people here who want to take our place. We have to understand that."

Q: What particularly worries you right now?

"I believe that the tunnels were built over the years to create a fortress, waiting for the day when we would move in. The IDF works smart, but it's hard work. As long as we are on the move, we are in good shape. If we are stationary that is when we will have problems; that's why undercover units were established and this is why the Shimshon unit needs to be re-established—it knows how to go inside, do what needs to be done, and leave secretly."

Q: Was Shimshon substantially different from the Duvdevan undercover unit?

"No, but our specialization in Gaza was unique. Duvdevan operated in Judea and Samaria. In Judea and Samaria, you dress up as a school principal or a businessman. In Gaza, you disguise yourself as a worker. In Judea and Samaria, the population is more intelligent; Gaza is the pits. As time passes, people with money leave Gaza and what's left is the worst of the worst. In Judea and Samaria, people use perfume; in Gaza not. We didn't shower for days so we would be filthy. Imagine washing your hair with scented shampoo and then going out on an undercover mission. You would become a target straight away.

"The closure of the Shimshon Unit was another measure that reduced our human intelligence in Gaza. It is impossible to compare the number of collaborators before and after we left Gaza. In Judea and Samaria, the Palestinians say that whoever dreams of carrying out an attack at night, gets up in the morning and the Shin Bet arrests him. This is not the case now in Gaza. We saw evidence of this with the failure of the elite Sayeret Matkal [the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit] operation there two years ago. It's like entering an enemy country like Syria or Lebanon."

Q: From your deep knowledge of Gaza, what do you think will happen there in the short term, even before "the day after"?

"If people are hungry, more and more terrorists will turn to the Shin Bet and Unit 504 [a secretive IDF intelligence unit that operates agents and interrogates prisoners] and provide information in exchange for aid. It's already happening. Gaza will descend into chaos. For us, this may be an advantage, because it will allow us to gather better intelligence."

Q: What should "the day after" look like?

"For years, wealthy people left Gaza. They paid to leave. We need to encourage them to leave."

Q: Assuming that there will be countries willing to take them in.

"The problem, and other countries understand this, is that they [Palestinians] have no ambition to be a prosperous people. In 1970, during Black September, they tried to assassinate the king of Jordan. They tried to turn Jordan into a terrorist state and were expelled after a year of fighting.

"Lebanon, a prosperous country, deteriorated into a civil war after they [the Palestinians] built up Fatahland. In Kuwait, the emir expelled them to Judea and Samaria. And since their only aspiration is to eliminate us, in Gaza they will always return to their ways."

Q: Things are heating up in the north. What lessons can we draw from Gaza when it comes to Lebanon?

"The most important thing is the images coming out of Gaza. The Middle

East understands the language of power and the destruction in Gaza resonates in the Arab world. Even those countries that want to make peace with us, the Saudis, the Emiratis, want to know that they are forming a defense alliance with a strong country. So, what happens in Gaza is clearly heard and seen in Lebanon. [Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan] Nasrallah, unlike [Hamis leader in Gaza Yahya] Sinwar, loves Lebanon, and the [2006] Second Lebanon War left a scar on him. He doesn't want Lebanon to be left in ruins, and that gives us leverage over him."

Q: What do you advise reservists coming out of Gaza today?

"The situation of the soldiers is insane; they can be fighting in Gaza, be given a short break, and within half an hour they can be home. Something about this scenario just doesn't work out. These are powerful experiences and people's realities can get mixed up. These transitions confuse the mind, and people can find themselves loading their weapons in everyday situations because they are still in a state of operational alertness. This is something that is typical of undercover soldiers—one day you are a resident of Gaza, and another day you are an ordinary citizen.

"I remember going out one time during my military service and stopping to fill up with gas. I saw an Arab gas station attendant holding a fueling nozzle, and within a second, I was in another place, seeing a terrorist, a refugee camp, thinking someone was coming to kill us. That's when I realized something was wrong with me.

"I dealt with the trauma by myself for years, so I say to soldiers that they should talk about things, and let things go. For the families, my message is to pay attention to outbursts of violence, nightmares and alienation. Without care and attention, this violence seeps into society. It is important to give people the feeling that they are not alone, and more important, to deal with the whole trauma issue at the state level."

REFUGEES FROM OTHER WARS VS. FROM GAZA

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 22-1-24)

Eugene Kontorovich writes in a Wall Street Journal op-ed:

Refugees flee every other war, but Palestinians are kept prisoners of Hamas.

Gaza is unique among modern war zones. Despite being the center of a conflict fought in dense urban areas, it hasn't produced waves of refugees leaving for neutral countries. This has been deliberate, the result of policies by Hamas and Egypt tacitly supported by the U.S.

Every prolonged conflict creates refugees. Months after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, 3.5 million Ukrainians had applied for temporary residence in countries such as Poland and Germany. The Syrian civil war produced five million refugees—nearly a quarter of the country's prewar population. The U.S. invasion of Iraq produced two million international refugees, and a similar number of people were displaced internally. Fleeing a war zone and seeking asylum in a neutral country is a human right enshrined in the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. If civilians hadn't been allowed to flee past conflicts, their death tolls would have been even higher.

Yet three months after Oct. 7, fewer than 1,000 people—either foreign nationals or wounded—have been allowed by Egypt and Hamas to leave Gaza. In Israel this month, Secretary of State Antony Blinken rejected the possibility of Israel helping Gazans who wish to escape the conflict to do so. But he also complained that the war's toll on Gaza civilians was "far too high" and echoed earlier demands that Israel "do more" to reduce the collateral damage caused by Hamas's hiding behind its population.

Palestinians and the Arab world alike like to talk about Palestinian "sumud," or steadfastness - how they heroically stay on what they consider their land. But Gazans want to leave. They are trying any and every means to find ways to exist Gaza. Their families are paying thousands of dollars to Egyptian brokers to in turn bribe officials to put their names on the lists of people allowed to leave. (That bribery system has been around from way before October 7.)

Egypt and Jordan have flatly stated they do not want any Palestinians to take refuge in their countries, ostensibly both for security reasons and to enhance Palestinian "sumud." But as this infographic shows, there was no such insistence to keep Syrian civilians out of their countries during that country's civil war.

Not that Arab countries welcomed the Syrians with open arms; there was resistance. But in the end, millions of Syrians were able to flee to other Arab or Muslim-majority countries. Many of them returned in recent years. And these countries had also allowed refugees from Iraq and other trouble spots.

But no one wants Palestinians.

Even when Palestinians want to leave.

Before the war, some 29% of Gazans said they would like to emigrate.

The news media simply doesn't want to highlight the hypocrisy in the Arab and Muslim world towards Palestinians - they claim that they support Palestinians but they simply do not want to save any of them.

And nothing shows that hypocrisy better than comparing how Muslim countries allowed millions of Syrians to take refuge - and not one says they will accept the Palestinians they claim to support.

WHY DOES BIDEN WANT TO REWARD HAMAS WITH A PALESTINIAN STATE?

JOEL B. POLLAK (Breitbart.com 23-1-24)

President Joe Biden continues to insist that a Palestinian state emerge at the end of Israel's war with Hamas, despite the fact that doing so would reward Hamas for the terror attack of October 7, and encourage similar attacks — and not just against Israelis.

The idea of a Palestinian state has become something of a fetish in foreign policy circles. In the latter years of the George W. Bush administration, the conventional wisdom — uniting the old establishment right with the new anti-war left — was that resolving the Palestinian issue would solve all of the other problems in the Middle East.

President Donald Trump, too, tried to arrange the “deal of the century” and a two-state solution— before concluding that the Palestinians were not really interested. He dropped the idea.

The result: the Abraham Accords, creating peace and normal diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab and Muslim states.

The lesson: a Palestinian state is not a necessary condition for peace in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia learned that lesson, which is why, on the verge of a deal with Israel, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) insisted only on improving living conditions for Palestinians, not a Palestinian state.

The only ones who did not learn were Biden and the wonks around him.

In fact, just before October 7, reports emerged that the White House was blocking a Saudi-Israeli peace deal because the Biden administration was insisting on a Palestinian state. (Notably, not one new country has joined the Abraham Accords under Biden.)

Many Israelis, too, were once enamored of the idea of a Palestinian state, believing it might represent the end of the conflict that has troubled locals for the past century. As recently as 2012, 61% of Israelis supported a Palestinians state; 30% opposed it.

Now the proportions are exactly the opposite: 65% oppose a Palestinian state, and 25% support it.

The reason for the shift is simple: Palestinians used their control of Gaza to launch rockets and terror attacks against Israel rather than building their own future.

Those who excuse this behavior claim that Palestinians have the right to “resist” because they are still “occupied” by Israel, even though the last Israeli soldiers and settlers left Gaza in 2005. They point to the fact that Israel (and Egypt) have blockaded Gaza since 2007.

That is not “occupation”: it is a response to the fact that Hamas, a terrorist organization funded and armed by Iran, launched a coup and took over Gaza, importing weapons and diverting civilian goods, like cement, to build its terror tunnels.

Over in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority — run by the supposedly more “moderate” Fatah organization — has not done much better. Its police force — armed and trained by the U.S. — suppresses some terror against Israel. But the government itself pays stipends to Palestinian terrorists and pensions to their families.

Faced with the loss of U.S. aid unless “pay-to-slay” was stopped, corrupt Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas — now in the 20th year of his first four-year term — refused.

It is impossible to observe the behavior of Palestinian leaders, Palestinian terrorists, and pro-Palestinian activists in the West and not to conclude that Palestinians do not actually want a state.

They rejected the United Nations partition plan in 1947; they reject Israel's right to exist today.

Moreover, they do nothing — nothing — to build their own institutions, to invest in their economy, or to educate their children to build their future. Instead, they indoctrinate children to hate Jews and aspire to jihad against Israel.

Palestinian nationalism is actually a rather shallow concept. It began as pan-Arab nationalism, a vague desire to affiliate with the rest of the Arab world. “Palestinian” typically meant “Jewish” until 1948; what we call

“Palestinian” identity today emerged later.

There are no Palestinian national holidays, except “Nakba Day,” which marks Israeli independence. The very idea of the “Nakba” — the “catastrophe” of 1948 — is an attempt to appropriate the Holocaust, which Palestinians think is the only reason Israel exists.

There is a Palestinian people, but they are divided — between the Islamists of Hamas and the nationalists of Fatah, the peasants of Gaza and the elites of Ramallah. The only thing that unites them is hostility to Israel.

That, by itself, is not sufficient to sustain the goal of building an independent state.

And what kind of state?

Note that the Biden administration, the European Union, and the United Nations never ask that question, nor do they ask Palestinians to contribute anything toward their own self-determination.

There may be a Palestinian state one day. But it will require that Hamas be destroyed and the Iranian regime be blocked from meddling. It will also require the de-radicalization — the de-Nazification — of the Palestinian population, which will be impossible while ideologues pontificate from abroad.

Netanyahu is right and Biden is wrong: whatever else a Palestinian state might be, it is not an answer to this conflict. And the world cannot want a Palestinian state more than Palestinians want one themselves.

IF YOU SAY MEN GIVE BIRTH, WE KNOW YOUR POSITION ON HAMAS

DENNIS PRAGER (Hotair.com 17-1-24)

If you say “men give birth,” we all know your position on Hamas.

Now, why is that? Why, if a person says “men give birth” or says that men who say they are women should be allowed to compete in women's sports, can we be virtually certain that the person sides with Hamas in its war to eradicate Israel?

Theoretically, the two claims — that men as well as women give birth and Israel is the villain in its war against Hamas — have absolutely no connection.

But they do — for two reasons.

Reason No. 1:

When people have a distorted moral value system, that distortion applies to just about every issue. Just as a broken compass will almost always point in the wrong direction, a broken moral compass will do the same. However, to be more precise, people who say “men give birth” and who side with Hamas, i.e., progressives and leftists — liberals don't believe men give birth or side with Hamas — do not merely have a broken moral compass. They have a moral compass that works in the way progressives and leftists have configured it: North always points south and east always points west.

Some examples of how the progressive compass works:

— Women who object to men who say they are women competing in women's sports — even in weightlifting — are haters and bigots (“transphobes”). The men who compete against them are heroes.

Adults who object to schools' sponsoring drag queen performances for 6-year-olds are haters and bigots (“transphobes”). The teachers who take children to drag queen events are progressive, compassionate and open-minded.

If a 9-year-old girl says she is a boy, the only therapists she is allowed to see are those who engage in “gender affirmation,” which is, of course, a left-wing Orwellian term. The one thing these therapists do not do is affirm the actual gender of the child.

All-black dorms on college campuses are anti-racist. Objecting to racially segregated dorms is racist.

Those who want to build walls or fences to prevent millions of people from illegally entering the country are xenophobic. Those who oppose building such barriers and declare their cities “sanctuary cities” are humanitarians.

Demanding that citizens show a voter ID before being allowed to vote — the norm in virtually every democracy in the world — constitutes “voter suppression.”

If we have fewer police officers, we will have safer cities.

Marriage is a product of patriarchal misogyny. It wasn't created to protect and honor women, but to exploit them. Anyway, a woman needs a man as much as a fish needs a bicycle.

Scientists who express skepticism about catastrophic man-made global warming are science-deniers.

These are some of the morally and factually perverse positions of the left. Just about every individual who holds these positions also holds the morally

perverse position that Israel is the villain and Hamas and its Palestinian supporters are the moral party.

The converse is also true: With the exception of Muslims, those who are anti-Israel also tend to believe that men give birth and the other examples of left-wing moral chaos. Few Muslims — certainly no religious ones — believe that men give birth or that children should be taken to drag queen shows. They just want Israel destroyed.

Reason No. 2:

People who say that men give birth also say that Israel is the villain because these positions emanate from the same aim: the destruction of Western civilization, beginning with the destruction of the West's moral and social norms.

When people say that men give birth and that men can compete in women's sports, they are seeking to undo the bases of Western civilization: truth, science, and the belief that we live in an ordered universe. That is why the left is so adamant about denying that sex ("gender") is binary. The fact that there are only two sexes represents order — natural and, worse, divine.

Those on the left unwittingly acknowledge the connection between their anti-Western positions and their Israel-hatred. They routinely attack Israel for being an "outpost of Western civilization." That is precisely what Israel is. Which tells you a great deal about both of Israel's enemies — the left and much of the Muslim world.

THE 'PALESTINIANIZATION' OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

ROBERT NEUFELD (Jpost.com 18-1-24)

The genocide case in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) brought by South Africa against Israel lifts the veil over a process that has been affecting the entire corpus of international law – already far exceeding its roots in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is the "Palestinization" of international law.

International law has always been deeply infested with politics, certainly when regarding the Laws of Armed Conflict. No country is eager to restrain itself according to external limits imposed upon its freedom to use its powers. Those who pushed for such restraints were usually those who could benefit from them, and those who objected were those who could lose their advantage.

It usually took dramatic and unfortunate events, which exacted a terrible price, to bring about significant leaps in law that truly benefit humanity. The most important of these was War World II, which led to the 1945 Geneva Conventions, and soon after, in 1948, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which is now the focus of the ICJ.

And now, once again, politics are consuming international law, pruning it back to suit political agendas. International law has been "Palestinized."

You need not fully agree with Israel's policies or actions to realize that – due to its isolated international stance, facing tens of Arab and Muslim countries and being caught up in the clash between the superpowers – Israel has become the punching bag of the international system. The absurd and overwhelmingly disproportionate number of resolutions lodged against Israel in international organizations – such as the UN – has become normalized.

The results of a vote to adopt a draft resolution are shown on a display during an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly on the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, at UN headquarters in New York City, US, October 27, 2023 (credit: Mike Segar/Reuters)Enlarge image

The results of a vote to adopt a draft resolution are shown on a display during an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly on the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, at UN headquarters in New York City, US, October 27, 2023 (credit: Mike Segar/Reuters)

For example, according to UN Watch, from 2015-2022, the UN General Assembly adopted 140 resolutions on Israel and 68 on other countries. Between 2006-2022, the UN Human Rights Council adopted 99 resolutions against Israel; 41 against Syria; 13 against Iran; 4 against Russia; and 3 against Venezuela. Regardless of the tens or even hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths each year in conflicts around the world – the unimaginable atrocities and millions displaced annually – an extra-terrestrial landing on Earth would be certain that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is this world's main problem.

This does not stop at the gates of politics: willing or not, the entire body of international law is now being "Palestinized." Core concepts of international law are literally being refashioned to accommodate Palestinian interests. The examples are abundant and – even more troubling – they

have seeped into the mainstream. They have changed the understanding of international law, which is now viewed through a Palestinian prism.

AFTER MORE than 100 days of war, Israel has not yet taken control of the Gaza Strip which it left in 2005, evacuating all its settlements, and where Hamas has proudly ruled for 17 years, with complete civil and security dominance. Any Israeli who would have dared cross the border would have been either shot or taken hostage.

Yet, for most of the international community, Gaza is still "occupied" by Israel. A new framework was invented, mostly based on Israel's control of the land borders (conveniently ignoring the Egyptian one of course), the air space, and the coastline. The absurdity hit an extreme when the South African legal delegation claimed before the ICJ that Israel had no right of self-defense following the October 7 massacre and that it is conducting operations in a territory it already "occupies."

Then came the "apartheid" allegation against Israel.

What we know about it from the South African experience is no longer relevant: A country that has been widely recognized as the only democratic state in the Middle East, is now being demonized as the world's worst violator of human rights, even with respect to its own two million Arab citizens, who enjoy unparalleled freedoms compared to most, if not all, Arab states. Israeli Arabs can vote, be elected to public office, and have even served as government ministers.

Numerous principles of International Humanitarian Law – the Laws of Armed Conflict – have been twisted, to cast Israel as a war criminal. From the principle of distinction to necessary precautions in attacks, to proportionality, to the means and methods of war – the standards are raised when it comes to Israel. Furthermore, even basic notions of international law, such as the definition of a "state," have been reformulated to fit into the Palestinized paradigm.

But the allegation of genocide is the final nail in the coffin.

The attribution of "the crime of all crimes" to Israel, which as its counsel rightly argued before the ICJ – was the victim of genocidal acts on October 7 and certainly not the perpetrator, completes the metamorphosis of international law. With the diminution of the primacy of genocide, the escalation has reached a climax: the emergence of a new, Palestinized international law.

Some may think this is solely Israel's problem. That the double standard will stop there. I disagree.

Even if the ICJ rules in Israel's favor, nothing is sacred anymore. A growing list of countries have announced their support for South Africa's argument. In the balance between politics and principles, politics prevails. Rest assured, some ICJ judges – even if in the minority – will rework the concept of genocide to "accommodate" at least some of Israel's actions. Other countries will soon need to meet these new criteria.

With the vulgarization of the crime of genocide, the blunt disrespect to what it really represents, an entire framework of laws (and crimes) built on the ashes of Auschwitz will lose its integrity, its internal hierarchy, and its relevance. It took almost 80 years for the humanitarian achievements that followed the atrocities of World War II to descend to petty politics, to be "Palestinized" and trivialized.

The case before the ICJ is not about genocide, it's about the future of international law.

THE WEST'S LETHAL ERROR IN THE WAR AGAINST ISRAEL

MELANIE PHILLIPS (JNS.org 18-1-24)

In the current war in the Middle East, it's a given that a distinction must be drawn between Hamas and the "ordinary" Palestinian Arab residents of Gaza.

This distinction, however, is largely spurious.

An article in The Washington Free Beacon that drew upon interviews given to Israeli TV by freed hostages has confirmed that ordinary Gazans were deeply involved in the Oct. 7 pogrom and subjected the hostages to cruelty, abuse and starvation.

Nili Margalit recounted how Gazan "civilians, regular people" took her hostage at knifepoint in the Oct. 7 attack. Margalit said a "boy ... 17, maybe 18 years old" and an "older man with the knife" broke down the door of her home in Kibbutz Nir Oz and forced her, barefoot and in pajamas, into a stolen golf cart.

Margalit said she saw a "mob, thousands of people," including "women and children," pouring across Israel's breached border with Gaza less than two miles away.

She saw two boys, one "no more than four or five years old" and the other

15 or 16, riding an all-terrain vehicle that belonged to her father, a cattle breeder who was among those murdered that day. The boys had apparently already made one trip from Nir Oz to Gaza and were returning for another round of carnage.

A number of the freed hostages said they spent part of their captivity in family homes, hospitals and other civilian sites in Gaza where they were locked into rooms, starved and ill-treated.

Mia Schem, who was shot in the arm and abducted from the Supernova music festival, said her captors brought her directly to a hospital in Gaza as she was bleeding to death.

Schem then received no further treatment or even pain medication. She was taken to a private home where a man and his family held her captive with “pure hate,” forbidding her to speak, cry or move. She would go days without receiving food and was never allowed to bathe.

Bad as their conditions were, the hostages’ captors repeatedly told them that their lives would be at risk if they were discovered by ordinary Gazans.

The hostages hardly needed any such warning.

Sharon Aloni Cunio recalled how she and her twin three-year-old daughters were mobbed on Oct. 7 as terrorists brought them into Gaza on a tractor from their home in Nir Oz. “People start beating everyone who was sitting on the tractor—just beating us, from all sides. It was horrific,” she said.

The testimony of the freed hostages carries particular weight because these aren’t extreme nationalists. They are Israelis who, in general, were until Oct. 7 the most fervent believers in peaceful coexistence with the Palestinian Arabs, ferrying Gaza residents to hospital in Israel and establishing many bonds with them.

They believed that whatever the failings of Palestinian leaders, the Palestinian people just wanted to live alongside them in peace and security. Now they say something very different. “I experienced hell. Everyone there are terrorists,” said Schem. “There are no innocent civilians, not one.”

Agam Goldstein-Almog, who was abducted with her mother and two younger siblings after Hamas murdered her father and elder sister in their homes in Kfar Aza, said: “If we previously believed that there was a chance for peace, we’ve lost all faith in these people, especially after we were there and among the population.”

Nor are most Arabs living in the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria any different. Between Oct. 7 and Jan. 15, Rescuers Without Borders recorded more than 2,600 attacks targeting Israeli civilians and soldiers, including 760 cases of rock-throwing, 551 fire bombings, 12 attempted or successful stabbings and nine vehicular assaults.

The IDF has been fighting heavy battles in these territories to thwart attacks and destroy terrorist infrastructure. In recent weeks, it’s been investigating possible infiltration tunnels discovered near Jewish communities in the Hebron Hills in Judea and Shiloh in Samaria’s Binyamin region.

The Palestinian Authority has never condemned the Oct. 7 pogrom; on the contrary, its main party, Fatah, has repeatedly extolled the atrocities. A poll published by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showed support for Hamas in Judea and Samaria more than tripled after Oct. 7, with no fewer than 82% of Arabs there supporting the attack and 70% of them supporting the “armed struggle” against Israel.

In any moral universe, a set of people bent upon exterminating another would be treated as pariahs by the international community and their rights would be considered forfeit.

Yet America is even now insisting that the “route to peace” is through a Palestinian state that must be ruled by a “revitalized” and “reformed” P.A. There’s zero chance of any such reform. Such a state would merely revitalize the capacity of the Palestinian Arabs to inflict yet more genocidal attacks on Israel.

America and Britain remain wedded to the “two-state solution” because they refuse to acknowledge that this conflict is not over a division of land. Instead, it is a war of annihilation against the Jewish homeland that has lasted for almost 100 years.

Moreover, the reason the conflict still endures is the behavior of the West itself.

Led by Britain in the 1930s, the West has consistently rewarded and incentivized Arab aggressors bent on destroying Israel, while it has prevented Israel from taking the measures necessary to see off the threat once and for all.

The essential prerequisite for any solution is for the West to withdraw support for Palestinian aggression and unequivocally back Israeli self-defense. Deprived of both Western funding and validation, the

Palestinian agenda would fall apart.

Instead, the West continues to promote the murderous fiction that there are “good” Palestinians who deserve a state of their own—which would be a terror state with Israel at its mercy.

The West’s lethal error goes even deeper. America and the U.K. have failed to realize that, just as Hamas can’t be divorced from the Palestinians but are part of the same genocidal entity, so the war against Israel is merely the most neuralgic element of a civilizational war between the Muslim world and the West.

That war was declared in 1979, when the Islamic revolution in Iran galvanized and radicalized Sunni as well as Shi’ite Muslims across the world, helping to create al-Qaeda.

The new Iranian regime declared war on the West and has prosecuted that war ever since with virtually no pushback. Instead, Western appeasement has helped finance and bolster Iran’s terrorism, proxy wars and quest for hegemony.

That catastrophic strategy, combined with the West’s continued financing and support of the Palestinian agenda, enabled the Hamas pogrom and onslaught on Israel from multiple fronts in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Judea and Samaria.

This already metastasizing conflict is feared to presage a world war in which Russia and China join Iran against a West which has shown such lamentable enfeeblement in the Middle East.

Britain and America do not only insist that “bad” Hamas is different from the “good” Palestinians. They similarly claim that al-Qaeda, ISIS and other radical Islamists are merely rogue actors in an otherwise unthreatening Muslim world.

Both Britain and America have accordingly failed to recognize how jihadist intent upon conquering the West for Islam—as Hamas has said is its own ultimate aim—have tunneled into British and American democratic structures and institutions as devastatingly as they have tunneled into Israel from Gaza and Lebanon.

As a result of myopia, muddled thinking and moral cowardice, America and Britain are not just aiming to ensure that an Israel they protect from outright annihilation will nevertheless continue to twist in the murderous Islamist wind. They have also advertised to the enemies of civilization that the West itself is ripe for conquest.

HAMAS DENIES IT SLAUGHTERED CIVILIANS ON OCT. 7

DAVID ISAAC (JNS.org 23-1-24)

Hamas on Sunday released a statement denying its members committed atrocities on Oct. 7.

The denial is a complete reversal for the terrorist group and a total disavowal of its own footage, after it supplied GoPro cameras to its operatives so that they could capture for posterity their horrific deeds on that day.

“Avoiding harm to civilians, especially children, women and elderly people, is a religious and moral commitment by all the Al-Qassam Brigades’ fighters,” Hamas stated in the 16-page document, claiming it only targeted Israeli military sites. (The Al-Qassam Brigades is Hamas’s so-called military wing.)

“We reiterate that the Palestinian resistance was fully disciplined and committed to the Islamic values during the operation and that the Palestinian fighters only targeted the occupation soldiers and those who carried weapons against our people,” it added, saying that its members were “keen to avoid harming civilians” and that any such targeting was by accident.

The claim is astonishing given the hours of footage taken by the organization’s members in which they’re seen shooting innocent Israelis throughout Oct. 7.

(The first batch of medicine destined for the remaining hostages entered the Gaza Strip last week. Israel is still waiting for proof that the medicines reached the captives.)

Hamas continues to hold 136 hostages, although a few dozen of them are believed to have died.

Avi Hyman, spokesman for Israel’s National Public Diplomacy Directorate, remarking on Hamas’s recent denial, told JNS on Monday that “Hamas is only fooling themselves, if anyone at all.

“What we saw on October 7 was, in the words of the German chancellor [Olaf Scholz], a new type of Nazi. But the thing about the Nazis is the Nazis tried to cover up their crimes at the end of the war, whereas Hamas were Nazis with GoPros. They were filming the whole thing,” Hyman said.

“Why they would think that today, 108 days later, we would believe this nonsense is absurd. But again, we know who Hamas is. We know that they butcher babies and we know they butcher the truth,” he said.

Hamas’s about-face, from proudly streaming its atrocities to denying it ever carried them out is driven by two things—fear and pressure brought on by successful Israeli PR—Mordechai Kedar, a senior research associate at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, told JNS.

First, Hamas is scared. “Israel is determined to carry on the war whatever the price in order to get rid of Hamas. And in Khan Yunis, apparently the IDF has had some successes and they are afraid that the IDF will wipe them out,” Kedar said. “They’ll now say whatever they think will help them.”

Second, the Hamas statement is an acknowledgment that Israel’s public relations battle has been working. Israel managed to paint Hamas as another ISIS. The terrorist group is trying to improve its image “after Israeli hasbara [public diplomacy] equated them with ISIS. Since the first day, Israel was saying, ‘Hamas is ISIS. ISIS is Hamas,’” he said.

Even U.S. President Joe Biden adopted the formula, Kedar noted. On Oct. 18, Biden said Hamas has “committed evil atrocities that make ISIS look somewhat rational.”

Israel used clips that Hamas’s own men uploaded to Telegram against it. Israel made a “movie of horrors,” based in part on footage from terrorists’ GoPros, Kedar said, along with other footage taken from dash cams of victims, cellphones and security cameras.

Israel has shown the 40-plus minute video far and wide.

Nonetheless, many people will still believe Hamas’s latest lie, said Kedar, noting that when he appears on Arabic media, he’s told even by the moderators that “Israel has no proof.

“I tell them that those terrorists actually burnt the bodies of girls they raped in order to erase all evidence,” he said.

Such deniers aren’t just in the Islamic world but also in the West, Kedar said. Supporting his assessment, The Washington Post on Sunday reported that “Oct. 7 denial is spreading” in online forums.

Oct. 7 “Truthers” have started calling the Hamas invasion an Israeli false flag operation, according to the report.

“A small but growing group denies the basic facts of the attacks, pushing a spectrum of falsehoods and misleading narratives that minimize the violence or dispute its origins. Some argue the ambush was staged by the Israeli military to justify an invasion of Gaza,” the Post reported.

“Hamas is trying to inflate those rumours that Israel is lying about the whole thing,” Kedar said. “It totally goes against reality.”

‘IF YOU ARE READING THESE WORDS, SOMETHING PROBABLY HAPPENED TO ME’

ILYA EGOROV (IsraelHayom.com 24-1-24)

Among the 21 soldiers who died in Monday’s building collapse in Maghazi, the central Gaza Strip, was Master Sgt. (res.) Elkana Vizel, 35, a resident of Bnei Dekalim in southern Israel. Vazel, married to Galit and a father of four, worked as a teacher at the Naom School in Bnei Dekalim, where his wife also works.

On Tuesday, just hours after he was killed, it emerged that he had prepared a letter ahead of time for the event of his being killed in action.

“If you are reading these words, something probably happened to me. First of all, in case I was captured by Hamas, I demand that no deal be made to release any terrorist in order to release me. Our overwhelming victory is more important than anything, so please—just press ahead with all the force until our victory is as overwhelming as possible,” Vazel wrote in the letter that was retrieved with his body.

The letter continues: “Maybe I fell in battle. When a soldier falls in battle it is sad. But I ask you to be happy. Don’t be sad when you part from me. Sing a lot, hold each other’s hands, and strengthen one another. We have so much to be excited and happy about—we are the generation of Jewish redemption! We are writing the most meaningful moments in the history of our people and the whole world. So please be optimistic. Keep choosing life all the time—a life of love, hope, purity and optimism.”

He continues with the theme of celebrating life rather than mourning his death: “Look into the eyes of your loved ones and remind them that everything they experience in this life is worth it and that they have a lot to live for. Live! Don’t stop for a moment the intensities of life! I was wounded in ‘Operation Protective Edge [against Hamas in 2014].’ I had the choice to stay behind, but I don’t regret for a moment returning to be a fighter. On the contrary, it’s the best decision I ever made.”

Itamar Vazel wrote on Facebook on Tuesday: “The heart refuses to believe

the words I’m writing. My twin brother Elkana Vazel is no more. He fell heroically in battle yesterday in the Gaza Strip.”

Elkana’s friend Shuki Shomron wrote on Facebook: “Rabbi Elkana taught with me at the school in Bnei Dekalim. A very sweet and talented man, kind-hearted and an excellent friend. I was also privileged to go running with him sometimes, just him and me in the beautiful hills of our area.”

Vazel was buried on Tuesday afternoon in the military cemetery on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

HOW CAN THE WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS EVER END?

DAVID PATRIKARAKOS (Dailymail.co.uk 23-1-24)

The tunnel yawns from the earth beneath the Al-Azhar University in Gaza City. Once, Hamas terrorists would emerge from here to commit atrocities. For them it was just one more node in a 300-mile-long tunnel network that sprawls across subterranean Gaza devoted to a single goal: spewing terror into Israel.

Like all Hamas tunnels it is sheathed in layers of concrete bolstered by bags filled with sand.

Wedged beneath its roof, though, is one sack that stands out. Lightly coloured with blue Arabic lettering, it bears the logo of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

As an image encapsulating so much about this war, it could not be more revealing. It is also utterly unsurprising.

'I was not shocked to discover this,' said the Israel Defence Forces officer whose unit found the tunnel last month.

'After all, we have known for years that part of Hamas's method is to use aid for terror purposes.'

An Israeli soldier is clearly no impartial observer, but my investigation into UN agencies working in Gaza proves that these words cannot simply be dismissed.

Gaza is a 25-mile stretch of land that survives on international aid. Foreign cash is the mortar that binds the strip together. The World Health Organisation, World Food Programme, Red Cross, Red Crescent, Doctors Without Borders, to name just a few, all work here.

From 2014-2020, UN agencies alone spent \$4.5 billion in Gaza. In 2019, the UNRWA's budget was \$1.17 billion.

That is more than the combined budget of the International Atomic Energy Agency — charged with keeping the world safe from nuclear proliferation — the International Criminal Court, and the World Trade Organization for that year.

The theft and diversion of aid to Hamas is endemic, long-standing and well-known.

Hamas took over governance of the strip in 2007 and for a while UNRWA stood up to it. In February 2009, it temporarily halted all aid shipments to Gaza after Hamas seized hundreds of tonnes of food and other aid as it came into the territory.

But that changed, and over the years there have been many instances of Hamas reportedly stealing aid without consequences. In 2019, the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank, accused Hamas of diverting aid — specifically 250,000 kilograms of cattle meat — sent by Saudi Arabia for Ramadan.

The Palestinian News Agency Wafa was unequivocal: 'Hamas is stealing the sustenance of the poor,' it reported. 'Everything sent to Gaza is hijacked by Hamas and sold on the black market to the benefits of the lords of [Palestinian] division and their families.'

Of the \$4.5 billion of UN aid sent in from 2014-2020, over 80 per cent went to UNRWA.

The agency was founded in 1949 to assist Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed the foundation of Israel, and it is funded entirely by donations, principally from UN member states.

Its website reports that in 2022, the United States was the biggest donor at \$343 million, followed by Germany with \$202 million and the EU \$114 million. The UK gave \$21 million.

Of all the aid agencies, UNRWA is most vital to the effective functioning of Gaza. It is the lifeblood of the strip. This, of course, makes it uniquely vulnerable among UN agencies to the influence of Hamas.

Not least because wherever they operate, UN agencies are mandated to work with the local authorities — and in Gaza the local authorities are, of course, Hamas.

What is more, significant numbers of people who work for it are members of the terror group or supporters of it.

According to its website, UNRWA has 30,000 employees globally. 'Most of them,' it says, 'are Palestinian refugees [with] a small number of international staff'.

Its website claims to employ 'over 10,000 in the Gaza field office'. A senior source in the Israeli Defence establishment confirmed this. 'Of the thousands of UNRWA employees in Gaza, only around 27 or 29 are international; everyone else is local. Many will be Hamas members. And those who aren't will have friends or relatives who are.'

The truth of these words have been confirmed by former UNRWA officials. In 2004, Peter Hansen, UNRWA's former Commissioner-General, caused outrage when in an interview, he declared. 'Oh I am sure that there are Hamas members on the UNRWA payroll and I don't see that as a crime.'

Given the 30 per cent support of Hamas in Gaza at the time, and UNRWA's workforce of 11,000 Palestinians, at least some Hamas sympathisers were likely to be among its employees, he later explained. The effects of all this are plain to see.

On October 17, UNRWA tweeted about Hamas's theft of its fuel, saying it had 'received reports that yesterday a group of people with trucks purporting to be from the Ministry of Health of the de facto authorities in Gaza removed fuel and medical equipment from the Agency's compound in Gaza City'.

But it later deleted the tweet, and the subject did not arise again.

UNRWA says it is in control of aid deliveries, but photos on the Facebook page of the Hamas-run Rafah Governate of Police no less, show armed police on aid trucks being driven into UNRWA facilities.

The Arabic text that accompanies them is equally clear: 'Maintaining order in Rafah ensures that humanitarian aid can be distributed to citizens inside the refugee shelters,' it reads.

This raises serious questions. Even if UNRWA does not officially work with Hamas, but needs local security forces who answer to it to guard aid deliveries, how can it be sure that aid is distributed to refugees and not according to Hamas interests?

'So now either it's Stockholm syndrome where in order to do anything in Gaza they have to keep quiet about everything, or they are actively complicit,' observes the senior Israeli defence source.

'UNRWA benefits from UN marketing and the United Nations logo, but it operates completely differently,' he adds.

'It should be viewed as essentially the civil wing of Hamas.'

Whether true or not, there is no doubt UNRWA plays a leading role in helping to govern Gaza.

According to Hector Sharp, the agency's head of field legal office: 'Essentially, for the last few decades we have been operating a parallel government in Gaza.

'We had an education department, a healthcare department. We were building more schools, healthcare clinics. We had projects to build roads and playgrounds.'

UNRWA's responsibilities for schooling in Gaza are colossal — the organisation spends 58 per cent of the donations we send it on education. For many this is a cause of deep concern.

A report from the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, an Israeli non-profit organisation that monitors the content of school textbooks, found that between October 7 and November 6, at least 14 teachers and staff at UNRWA schools publicly celebrated the October 7 atrocities and other Hamas attacks on social media.

One UNRWA teacher in Gaza called Sarah Alderway posted a video clip to Facebook on the day of the massacre depicting Hamas members roaming Israeli streets with rifles while shooting at cars, alongside a Quranic verse reading: 'We will surely come to them with soldiers that they will be powerless to encounter, and we will surely expel them in humiliation, and they will be debased.'

In a Facebook post on October 10, Mahmoud Abu Adhm, a UNRWA employee in Gaza, encouraged Hamas to kill hostages, saying: 'Do not walk past a captive who has not been given amnesty without striking off his neck so as to terrorise the enemy,' citing Islamic texts that advocate harshness towards the enemy.

Another UNRWA teacher, Ranoosh Salah, published a post praising Hamas on October 7, using fire emojis and saying: 'This is an unforgettable glorious morning.'

These might be dismissed as isolated examples — albeit numerous and unacceptable — but the truth is that the rot is often structural.

Of the 500,000 students at school in Gaza, over half attend

UNRWA-operated schools and use Palestinian Authority textbooks that regularly depict Jews as enemies of Islam, glorify martyrs who commit attacks, and promote jihad for the liberation of historic Palestine.

In September 2021, the EU Parliament's Budgetary Control Committee approved withholding €20 million in aid to UNRWA if immediate changes to its education curriculum were not made.

According to the resolution, the Parliament was 'concerned about the hate speech and violence taught in Palestinian Authority school textbooks and used in schools by UNRWA'.

It also found that an Islamic education lesson designed for ten and 11-year-olds instructs students to discuss the 'repeated attempts by Jews to kill the Prophet' and then asks them to think of 'other enemies of Islam'.

Another lesson centres on Dalal Mughrabi, a female terrorist and one of those responsible for the so-called Coastal Road massacre in 1978 that killed 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children.

'Our Palestinian history is full of many names of martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the homeland,' it reads, 'including the martyr Dalal Mughrabi whose struggle took the form of defiance and heroism, which her memory is immortal in our hearts and minds'.

How can the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ever end when the next generation of Palestinians are taught such lessons?

A report from the Impact Institution claims it is 'statistically probable' that the majority of the estimated 3,000 Hamas terrorists who committed acts on October 7 were educated in UNRWA schools, as the agency operates the majority of schools in Gaza.

The results are depressingly inevitable: a UNRWA diploma belonging to a terrorist called Amer Yaser Nazmi Sada was found in a car used in the October 7 massacres.

Of course, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza means that getting aid to the strip is unquestionably critical and the UN is vital in dispensing it.

But there seems little doubt that there are those within the organisation who tend to advocate on behalf of Hamas and ignore the atrocities the terror group perpetrated against Israel.

Take UN Women, for example, a charity that in its own words works to ensure that, among other things, 'all women and girls live a life free of violence'.

The sexual violence on October 7, when Israeli women were beaten and raped by laughing terrorists, and the subsequent abuse of female hostages, were surely the kind of abhorrent acts it was set up to oppose.

But it was only on November 28, 2023, more than 50 days after the massacres, that UN Women posted — and then inexplicably deleted — its first condemnation of Hamas.

In fact, it took until December 2 for it to finally tweet a condemnation of attacks that it was content to leave up.

But even this was disingenuous.

The tweet itself was no condemnation at all: 'We reiterate that all women, Israeli women, Palestinian women, as all others, are entitled to a life lived in safety and free from violence.'

It was only those very few who clicked on and actually read the linked report who finally found the words, 'We unequivocally condemn the brutal attacks by Hamas on October 7.'

I recently spoke to Tal Heinrich, a spokeswoman from the Israeli Prime Minister's office. 'The conduct of UN Women since October 7 has been preposterous,' she told me.

'It took around two months for them to start taking note of Hamas using rape as a weapon of war. And it only acted after the Israeli Mission announced that it was organising a conference on the subject.'

She continued: 'These murdered women of October 7 were killed twice. Once when they were raped, and once when they had a bullet put in them. We will not allow them to be murdered a third time — by silence.'

UN Women is relentlessly vocal about Gaza online. Between October 7 and November 23, 2023, it tweeted 26 statements on the conflict; only three tweets — always using the pro-Palestinian hashtag #Gaza — even mentioned Israel.

It also published testimony from Palestinian women in Gaza, citing data from the Hamas-run Palestinian Health Ministry, and calling for a ceasefire.

It has still to publish any testimony from an Israeli woman about the events of October 7, a state of affairs so contrary to its professed mission that it looks wilful.

Meanwhile, UNICEF, the UN agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide, posted a total of 264 tweets

between October 7 and November 29, 99 of which were tweets about the unquestionably heart-breaking situation of those in Gaza.

But absent was any footage relating to October 7. Astonishingly, UNICEF could not even bring itself to mention Hamas in any of its posts from that day.

For its part, the World Health Organisation, also part of the UN, did not even refer to Hamas in its initial assessment of October 7.

This behaviour strays into the realms of the perverse. And make no mistake, it can be dangerous: if international agencies don't acknowledge Hamas's atrocities, it incentivises the terror group to commit more. The result of this is more death: of Israeli civilians, and then, when Israel responds, of yet more Palestinians.

On Friday afternoon, I spoke with Juliette Touma, UNRWA's Director of Communications. She had just left Gaza and sounded unsurprisingly affected at witnessing the slow motion tragedy there.

She dismissed allegations of Hamas infiltration of UNRWA. 'Every UNRWA employee goes through a vetting process,' she told me. 'We send the list of employees to host governments across the region — including to Israel as an occupying power.

'We have never had a response let alone an objection of any staff.[The Israelis say the list is shared but with not enough information that it can actually be used.]

'We can also confirm there is no diversion of UNRWA aid in Gaza,' she added. 'UNRWA are direct implementers. We have control of aid at every step of the delivery process, from beginning to end.'

On the subject of education and UNRWA employees reportedly celebrating the October 7 atrocities, she was clear. 'For us at UNRWA, the education issue is not new; the agency takes it very seriously. Let me also reiterate our utter condemnation of the horrific October 7 attacks carried out by Hamas.

'When we faced previous similar allegations in the past, we investigated and terminated contracts when enough evidence was found about breach of UN values and principles. We have now requested an independent review of claims of the Agency's alleged affiliation with Hamas.'

There are many people like Touma doing vital work in UN agencies in Gaza and around the world, but when parts of these organisations fail to adequately hold Hamas to account — to say nothing of reinforcing its hold through vile educational materials throughout Gaza — these agencies end up, whether intentionally or not, becoming complicit.

And we should care about this. Because it stokes a conflict that has the potential to throw the entire world into turmoil.

We should care because it contributes to the deaths of thousands of civilians on both sides.

And finally, we should care because everything these organisations do is paid for by us.

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY DEATH TOLL NOW EXCEEDS GAZA POPULATION

DAVE SWIDLER (PreOccupiedTerritory.com 18-1-24)

The grim civilian fatality statistics from Israel's ongoing operation in this coastal territory in the wake of a Hamas invasion of southern Israel on October 7 hit an unfortunate milestone today, surpassing the total number of civilians in the territory, according to Ministry of Health records.

The ministry announced today that the dead from Israeli air, naval, artillery, tank, and infantry fire stands at 2.05 million, compared to the entire Gaza Strip population, last recorded at 2.048 million.

Human rights groups condemned Israel for the ongoing onslaught. "This is a crime against humanity on an unprecedented scale," declared Human Rights Watch. "Never before in the history of warfare has an aggressor killed more noncombatants than there were noncombatants in the targeted area."

A statement by Médecins Sans Frontières sounded a similar tone. "The brutality of Israeli actions against innocent Gazans knows no bounds," it read. "This dark milestone represents an indictment not just of the Israeli military and its political superiors, but of the international community, which has failed repeatedly in the course of this war to stop Israel from its inhuman onslaught."

"What's more," MSF continued, "all of these casualties are children, medical personnel, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers, some of them all of the above."

Experts warned that if the release of Gaza Ministry of Health casualty figures continues at a similar rate, by mid-year the death toll there will exceed the global Palestinian population, estimated at about ten million.

"If Israel keeps bombing Gaza, these numbers are going to keep getting worse," warned Amnesty International. "In fact, in just a few years, if the Israeli assault keeps up, the number of Palestinian dead will top the entire population of Earth. Woe to the generation that stands idly by while such atrocities happen."

The same organizations adopted a circumspect, even skeptical, stance regarding the reports from inside Israel on and after October 7, which documented Palestinian atrocities including mass rape, mutilation, torture, kidnapping, looting, vandalism, arson, mass murder, and other crimes - with some members of the human rights groups adhering to "the IDF killed all those Israelis" and "Hamas treated captives well" fictions long after evidence from Hamas itself debunked them. Any statements by those organizations criticizing the October 7 massacres made sure never to mention Palestinian violence alone, always taking care to denounce, in close proximity to such mentions, Israeli actions aimed at bringing the perpetrators to justice and preventing recurrence. (satire?)

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

Q&A: CHEESE AND MEAT

OU HALACHA YOMIS (OUKosher.org)

I know that there are various customs as to how long one must wait between meat and milk. Is waiting between meat and milk a Rabbinic obligation or is it a custom?

The Torah says, “Do not cook a goat in its mother’s milk” (Shemos 23:19). Chazal understand from this pusuk that the only time that meat and milk become a violation on a Torah level is when the meat is cooked in milk. All other scenarios are only of Rabbinic nature.

The Gemara (Chullin 105a) states in the name of Rav Chisda that one who eats meat is forbidden to eat cheese afterwards, but one who eats cheese first may eat meat afterwards. Mar Ukva qualifies that when he would eat meat, he would not eat cheese until his next meal. There is disagreement among the Rishonim as to how to understand the ruling of Mar Ukva.

Rambam (Ma’achalos Asuros 9:28) explains that Mar Ukva was teaching us that one must wait approximately 6 hours, the usual length of time between meals. Shulchan Aruch (Y”D 89:1) follows this view of the Rambam and quantifies it to precisely 6 hours.

Tosfos (Chulin 105a L’sseudasa) understood that Mar Ukva meant that once one eats meat, it is forbidden to eat cheese until after the conclusion of that meal. In the next meal, dairy may be had. This view is that the issur of dairy after meat is not bound to a specific interval of time, but rather to eating dairy only in a separate meal. A separate meal is defined by having concluded the first meal with a Brochah Achrona. In addition to keeping the dairy to separate meals, one must also clean their mouth. The Rema (89:1) follows the opinion of Tosfos but adds that there is a minhag to wait one hour in addition to eating the dairy in a separate meal. The Rema does conclude that it is proper to wait the entire 6 hours. Interestingly, the common German custom is to wait only 3 hours.

Thus, while all agree that there is a definite Rabbinic obligation to wait between eating meat and milk, there are different opinions as to how long one must wait. For Sefardim who follow the ruling of Shulchan Aruch, waiting 6 hours is an absolute obligation. For Ashkenazim, who follow the ruling of the Rama, the obligation ends once one cleans out one’s mouth and recites a Beracha Achrona. Waiting one hour, three hours, or six hours are different customs.

Why is it that if I eat meat, I must wait before eating dairy, but if I eat dairy, I am not required to wait to eat meat?

The Rishonim give two reasons as to why one is required to wait 6 hours after eating meat.

- According to Rashi (Chulin 105a) this is because there can remain a lingering taste of meat in one’s mouth long after the eating.
- The Rambam (Ma’achalos Asuros 9:28) writes that this is because it is the nature of meat to get stuck between one’s teeth which is difficult to remove.

The Taz (89:1) and other poskim write that the common custom is to be strict and follow both opinions. Therefore, even if one would only chew meat and spit it out, one would have wait to eat dairy because of the meat that gets stuck between the teeth. Similarly, if one ate a food only cooked with fat with no actual meat inside, one must still wait 6 hours because of

the lingering taste. The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 89:1) adds that even when neither reason is applicable, one should still wait six hours because of a concept known as “lo plug” (halacha is consistent, even where the initial reason for the restriction does not apply).

These reasons apply to meat, but generally do not apply to dairy (with the exception of hard cheese as will be discussed at a later date). Therefore, after eating dairy, one is not required to wait before eating meat. However, one is required to clean out one’s mouth by eating some food (e.g. crackers) and having a drink (e.g. water).

Is one required to wait after eating aged cheese before eating meat?

The Issur V’Heter (40:10) writes that it is “midos chasidus” (exemplary behavior) for one who ate cheese that was aged for more than six months to not eat meat afterwards, because aged cheese has a strong flavor which lingers. However, one cannot forbid someone from eating meat afterwards since the lingering taste of cheese is subtle. Only the lingering taste of meat is considered meat. The Rema (YD 89:2) follows this ruling and writes that the custom is to require waiting after eating hard cheese before eating meat, similar to as one would wait after meat before eating cheese. Though one may not protest against those who are lenient, it is proper to be strict. Rav Yaakov Meir Stern (M’Beis Levi yr. 5755) writes that since waiting after aged cheese is only an extra stringency, in cases where there is a doubt as to how long the cheese has been aged, one may be lenient.

Do I need to wait six hours before I can eat meat after having eaten pizza? What about after eating eggplant parmesan?

Pizza is typically made with mozzarella cheese, which is aged for only one month and is not pungent. This is not considered a hard cheese, so there is no need to wait 6 hours.

Parmesan, however, is an aged cheese. The Yad Yehuda (89:30) maintains that one need not wait before meat after eating aged cheese that has been melted and mixed into a cooked food, such that the cheese is no longer noticeable. Although if meat is dissolved and mixed into another food, one must still wait 6 hours before eating dairy, being that the custom to wait after hard cheese is only a midos chasidus (exemplary behavior) and not an absolute requirement, in this case one may be lenient. The OU’s poskim have said that one may rely on this opinion. Therefore, if the pizza or eggplant parmesan is made with a combination of aged and non-aged cheeses, if the cheeses all melt together and are not independently noticeable, the leniency of the Yad Yehuda would apply, and one would not need to wait. However, if a pizza or eggplant parmesan was made exclusively with parmesan cheese, then one who eats this would need to wait.

As always, after eating any dairy food, even if the food is not made with aged cheese, one needs to clean and rinse his mouth and wash his hands before eating meat (Shulchan Aruch YD 89:2). Additionally, some have the custom to wait half an hour or an hour after all dairy before meat (Hagahos HaGra Y.D. 89:6 quoting Zohar).

I have heard that food technologists can now accelerate the aging of cheeses. Is this true, and would I have to wait six hours after eating such an “aged” cheese before eating meat?

As of the last twenty five years, many cheese products contain a flavor that is known in the dairy industry as “enzyme-modified cheese.” This is created by a process in which a fresh cheese curd is treated with special enzymes under specific heat conditions to produce a cheese flavor 15 to 30 times the intensity of natural cheese. Instead of waiting six to nine months to yield a desired flavor profile, the process takes two to four days.

Pri Megadim (Y.D., M.Z. 89, 4) cites two reasons for waiting six hours after eating aged cheese before eating meat. One is because the cheese is hard and may remain stuck between one’s teeth; the other is because the strong taste of aged cheese lingers in one’s mouth.

Although the texture of enzyme modified cheese is not hard (it is a liquid or powder) and we are not concerned about it remaining stuck in one’s teeth, its flavor may certainly linger. Pri Megadim writes that if a cheese has a strong flavor, even if it was not aged, one must still be machmir (stringent) and wait six hours (or whatever one’s custom is). Therefore, Rav Schachter concluded that in theory, if one were to eat plain enzyme modified cheese flavor, he should wait six hours before eating meat. However, enzyme modified cheese flavor is typically not sold as a stand-alone product, but rather it is incorporated into other foods (for example a cheese sauce). In the next Halacha Yomis, we will explain why it is not necessary to wait six hours in such instances.

The OU certifies crackers and popcorn with parmesan seasoning. Since

parmesan is a hard cheese that requires one who ate it to wait six hours before eating meat, do I similarly need to wait six hours after eating these snacks, before eating meat?

If the seasoning is primarily made from parmesan cheese, then one should wait six hours (or whatever one’s custom is). However, cheese seasonings are often made with enzyme modified cheese (EMC) which is mixed and essentially diluted with other bulkier ingredients, such as whey or blander cheese powders. In volume, the other ingredients constitute the majority of the seasoning. Yad Yehuda (Y.D. 89, 30) writes that a hard cheese which is blended into another food and softened through cooking does not necessitate waiting six hours. Similarly, in the case of enzyme modified cheese, Rav Schachter explained that since it is actually a soft cheese (albeit with a very strong flavor), once it is diluted to become a fraction of the seasoning, one would not have to wait after eating it.

Beshallach (Melb) 26/1/24, 17 Shvat 5784: 8:20pm/9:22pm